

# THE PRINCE OF GRAUSTARK

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THE more he thought of it the better it seemed to him, and so he sent a cipher message that was destined to throw his Paris managers into a state of agitation that cannot possibly be measured by words. In brief, he instructed them to engage a few peaceable, trustworthy and positively respectable gentlemen, — he was particularly exacting on the score of gentility — with orders to abduct the young lady and hold her in restraint until he arrived and arranged for her liberation! They were to do the deed without making any fuss about it, but at the same time they were to do it effectually.

He had the foresight to suggest that the job should be undertaken by the very detective agency he had employed to shadow young Seoville and also to keep an eye on Maude. Naturally, she was never to know the truth about the matter. She was to believe that her father came up with a huge sum in the shape of ransom, no questions asked. He also remembered in time and added the imperative command that she was to be confined in clean, comfortable quarters and given the best of nourishment. But, above all else, it was to be managed in a decidedly realistic way, for Maude was a keen-witted creature who would see through the smallest crack in the conspiracy if there was a single false movement on the part of the plotters. It is also worthy of mention that Mrs. Blithers was never — *decidedly never* — to know the truth about the matter.

He went in to luncheon in a very amiable, even docile frame of mind.

"I'VE thought the matter over, Lou," he said, "and I guess you are right, after all. We will make all the repairs necessary, but we won't consider living in it ourselves. We'll return good for evil and live in a hotel when we go to visit the royal family. As for —"

"I meant that you were to think hard before attempting to force Maude upon Prince Robin's subjects without preparing them for the —"

"I thought of that, too," he interrupted cheerfully. "I'm not going to cast my only child into the den of lions, so that's the end of it. Have you given the order, my dear?"

"No," she said; "for I knew you would change it when you came in."

Late that evening he had a reply from his Paris managers. They inquired if he was responsible for the message they had received. It was a ticklish job and they wanted to be sure that the message was genuine. He wired back that he was the sender and to go ahead. The next morning they notified him that his instructions would be carried out as expeditiously as possible.

He displayed such a beaming countenance all that day that his wife finally demanded an explanation. It wasn't like him to beam when he was worried about anything, and she wanted to know what had come over him.

"It's the sea-air, Lou," he exclaimed glibly. "It always makes me feel like a fighting-cock. I —"

"Rubbish! You detest the sea-air. It makes you feel like fighting, I grant, but not like a fighting-cock."

"There you go, trying to tell me how I feel. I've never known any one like you, Lou. I can't say a word that —"

"Have you had any news from Maude?" she broke in suspiciously.

"Not a word," said he.

"What have you done to Channie Seoville?" she questioned, fixing him with an accusing eye.

"Not a thing," said he.

"Then, what is it?"

"You won't believe me if I tell you," said he warily.

"Yes, I will."

"No, you won't."

"Tell me this instant why you've been grinning like a Cheshire cat all day."

"It's the sea-air," said he, and then: "I said you wouldn't believe me, didn't I?"

"Do you think I'm a fool, Will Blithers?" she flashed, and did not wait for an answer. He chuckled to himself as she swept imperiously out of sight around a corner of the deck building.

He was up bright and early the next morning, tingling with anticipation. There ought to be word from Paris before noon, and it might come earlier. He kept pretty close to the wireless operator's office, and was particularly attentive to the spitting crackle of the instrument.

About eleven o'clock a message began to rattle out of the air. It was in code and from his Paris representatives:

"Your daughter has disappeared from Paris. All efforts to locate her have failed. Friends say she left ostensibly for the Pyrenees but inquiries at stations and along line fail to reveal trace of her. Seoville still here and apparently in the dark. He is being watched. Her companion and maid left with her last night."

Prince of Graustark and party left for Edelweiss today."

So read the message from Paris.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

A WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT.

ONE usually has breakfast on the porch of the Hotel Schweizerhof at Interlaken. And there R. Schmidt sat facing the dejected Boske Dank. His eyes were dancing with the joy of living, and nothing better can be said of a man's character than that he is gay and happy at breakfast-time. He who wakes up refreshed and buoyant, and eager for the day's adventure, is indeed a child of nature. He will never grow old and crabbed; he will grip the hand of death when the time comes with the unconquered zeal that makes the grim reaper despise himself for the advantage he takes of youth.

"Well, here we are and in spite of that, where are we?" said Dank, who saw nothing beautiful in the smile of an early morn. "I mean to say, what have we to show for our pains? We sneak into this God-forsaken hamlet, surrounded on all sides by abominations in the shape of tourists, and at the end of twenty-four hours we discover that the fair Miss Guile has played us a shabby trick. I daresay she is laughing herself sick over the whole business."

"Which is more than you can say for yourself, Boske," said Robin blithely. "Brace up! All is not lost. We'll wait here a day or two longer and then — well, I don't know what we'll do then."

"She never intended to come here at all," said Dank, filled with resentment. "It was a trick to get rid of us. She —"

"Be honest, old chap, and say that it was a trick to get rid of *me*. Us is entirely too plural. But I haven't lost heart. She'll turn up yet."

"Count Quinnox is in despair over this extraordinary whim of yours, Highness. He is really ill in bed this morning. I —"

"I'll run up and see him after breakfast," cried the Prince, genuinely concerned. "I'm sorry he is taking it so seriously."

"HE FEELS that we should be at home instead of dithering about the —"

"That reminds me, Dank," broke in the Prince, fresh happiness in his smile; "I've decided that home is the place for you and the Count — and Gouron too. I'm perfectly able to take care of myself, — with some assistance from Hobbs, — and I don't see any necessity for you three to remain with me any longer. I'll tell the Count that you all may start for Vienna tonight. You connect with the Orient express at —"

"Are you mad, Highness?" cried Dank, startled out of his dejection. "What you speak of is impossible — utterly impossible. We cannot leave you. We were delegated to escort you —"

"I understand all of that perfectly, Dank," interrupted Robin, suddenly embarrassed, "but don't you see how infernally awkward it will be for me if Miss Guile does appear, according to plan? She will find me body-guarded, so to speak, by three surly, scowling individuals whose presence I cannot explain to save my soul, unless I tell the truth, and I'm not yet ready to do that. Can't you see what I mean? How am I to explain the three of you? A hawk-eyed triumvirate that camps on my trail from morn till night and refuses to budge! She'll suspect something, old fellow, and — well, I certainly will feel more comfortable if I'm not watched for the next few days."

"That's the point, Highness. You've just got to be watched for the next few days. We would never dare to show our faces in Graustark again if we allowed anything to happen to you while you are under our care."

"I see, Dank. If I find (Continued on page 236)"



Stepping at the rail she gazed up, one slim hand at her bosom

RETROSPECTIVE — Prince Robin of Graustark, traveling about the world, arrives in the Catskills to visit the Truxton Kings. W. W. Blithers, self-made multimillionaire and doting father of an only daughter, Maude, prematurely decides on the Prince as a son-in-law. He knows that Graustark is financially embarrassed as a result of the Balkan wars, and with the Blithers millions in mind he confides his domestic ambition to his wife. Blithers decides to lend Graustark \$16,000,000 and confers with Count Quinnox, the Graustark Minister of War. Meanwhile it is decided to give a ball at Blitherswood in honor of Prince Robin. Maude does not attend the ball, and Mr. Blithers, meeting the Prince the next day, apologizes and invites him to dinner and to be his son-in-law. Maude writes her parents that she and her former governess are going abroad, she under an assumed name, and expect to book passage on the Juniter. Coincidentally Prince Robin plans his return to Graustark, and sails under the name R. Schmidt, to avoid publicity. He meets a mysterious Miss Guile on board and is infatuated. She discovers that he is the Prince of Graustark. He wonders who she can be. Meanwhile they arrive in Paris and she disappears. The newspapers publish a denial by Miss Blithers of her engagement to Prince Robin. He gets a letter from Miss Guile inviting him to take her to tea. They motor to St. Cloud and are arrested for speeding, but the judge for some reason dismisses the case. Mr. Blithers, with his wife, sails for Europe.